

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

1.-29. (Canceled).

30. (Currently Amended) A method of manufacturing tyres for vehicle wheels, comprising the steps of:

disposing a carcass structure comprising at least one carcass ply on a primary drum;

assembling a belt structure comprising at least one belt layer on an auxiliary drum;

picking up the belt structure from the auxiliary drum;

transferring the belt structure to a coaxially centered position relative to the carcass structure; and

shaping the carcass structure into a toroidal configuration to engage the belt structure with the carcass structure,

wherein a pair of sidewalls, each extending until close to a radially internal edge of the carcass structure, are laterally applied to the carcass structure on opposite sides,

wherein the sidewalls are applied on the primary drum before shaping the carcass structure, and

wherein during said step of assembling said belt structure, at least one underbelt insert is associated with said at least one belt layer at a radially internal position, by:

applying said at least one underbelt insert onto an expandable support, said at least one underbelt insert having an axially internal portion tapering towards an equatorial plane of the tyre and an axially external portion; [[and]]

radially expanding the expandable support; and

~~to mutually join~~ joining the at least one belt structure layer to said at least one underbelt insert,

wherein an angular rotation is imposed to said at least one underbelt insert concurrently with the radial-expansion step, whereby the axially internal portion is oriented substantially parallel to an inner surface of the belt structure and the axially external portion is oriented tapering towards a rotational axis of the tyre in consequence of said angular rotation.

31. (Canceled).

32. (Currently Amended) The method as claimed in claim [[31]] 30, wherein application of said at least one underbelt insert is carried out through spiraling of at least one elongated element of elastomer material on the expandable support.

33. (Canceled).

34. (Canceled).

35. (Currently Amended) The method as claimed in claim ~~[[31]]~~ 30, wherein the step of assembling the belt structure on the auxiliary drum is carried out ~~during~~ after said radial-expansion step and simultaneously with the mutual-junction step, through winding of said at least one belt layer around the expandable support carrying said at least one underbelt insert.

36. (Currently Amended) The method as claimed in claim ~~[[31]]~~ 30, wherein, before the radial-expansion step, the belt structure picked up from the auxiliary drum is placed at a coaxially centered position relative to the expandable support.

37. (Previously Presented) The method as claimed in claim 36, wherein said mutual-junction step takes place through approaching between said at least one underbelt insert and the belt structure by effect of the radial-expansion step of the expandable support.

38. (Currently Amended) The method as claimed in claim ~~[[31]]~~ 30, wherein, before said transferring step and after said associating step, a step of pressing the belt structure against said at least one underbelt insert carried by the expandable support is carried out.

39. (Previously Presented) The method as claimed in claim 30, further comprising the step of applying a tread band around the belt structure disposed on the auxiliary drum.

40. (Previously Presented) The method as claimed in claim 39, wherein said tread band is applied through spiraling of at least one elongated element of elastomer material.

41. (Currently Amended) The method as claimed in claim 30, further comprising the step of applying a tread band at a radially external position to the belt structure that is assembled to the carcass structure shaped into a toroidal conformation, through spiraling of at least one elongated element of elastomer material.

42. (Previously Presented) The method as claimed in claim 39, wherein, before transfer of the belt structure, the step of bending the side edges of the tread band against axially external portions of said at least one underbelt insert coupled with the belt structure is carried out.

43. (Previously Presented) The method as claimed in claim 30, wherein the step of laying the carcass ply is carried out through an operation involving winding of the ply around the primary drum.

44. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for manufacturing tyres for vehicle wheels comprising:

a primary drum set to support a carcass structure comprising at least one carcass ply and a pair of sidewalls, each laterally applied to the carcass structure on opposite sides and extending until close to a radially internal edge of the carcass structure;

devices for applying the sidewalls on the primary drum;

an auxiliary drum having an abutment surface set to support a belt structure;

a transfer member movable between the primary drum and auxiliary drum; gripping devices associated with the transfer member to pick up the belt structure from the auxiliary drum; and

devices configured for application of at least one underbelt insert to said belt structure when the latter is at a position axially spaced apart from the carcass structure, the underbelt insert having an axially internal portion tapering towards an equatorial plane of the tyre and an axially external portion tapering towards a rotational axis of the tyre,

wherein said application devices comprise:

an expandable support;
~~devices for winding of the underbelt inserts on the expandable~~
support; and

actuator members to radially expand the expandable support between a first operating condition at which said support has a reduced diameter and a second operating condition at which said support has an increased diameter; and

devices for winding of the underbelt inserts on the expandable support set in the first operating condition,

wherein said actuator members are configured to impose an angular rotation to said at least one underbelt insert concurrently with the radial expansion of the expandable support, whereby the axially internal portion is oriented substantially parallel to an inner surface of the belt structure and the axially external

portion is oriented tapering towards a rotational axis of the tyre in consequence of said angular rotation.

45. (Canceled).

46. (Currently Amended) The apparatus as claimed in claim ~~[[45]]~~ 44, wherein said winding devices comprise at least one unit to feed an elongated element of elastomer material for application of said underbelt inserts through spiraling of said elongated element.

47. (Currently Amended) The apparatus as claimed in claim ~~[[45]]~~ 44, wherein said expandable support comprises an inflatable bladder, said actuator members being set to feed a fluid under pressure into the inflatable bladder.

48. (Previously Presented) The apparatus as claimed in claim 47, wherein said inflatable bladder has opposite end flaps in engagement with respective axially-opposite attachment flanges.

49. (Currently Amended) The apparatus as claimed in claim ~~[[45]]~~ 44, wherein the expandable support comprises a drum having circumferentially distributed apertures, through which radially movable sectors operate upon command of the actuator members.

50. (Currently Amended) The apparatus as claimed in claim ~~[[45]]~~ 44, wherein said expandable support is laterally spaced apart from the auxiliary drum.

51. (Currently Amended) The apparatus as claimed in claim ~~[[45]]~~ 44, wherein said expandable support defines the abutment surface of the auxiliary drum.

52. (Currently Amended) The apparatus as claimed in claim ~~[[45]]~~ 44, further comprising pressing members operating on the expandable support to cause pressing of the belt structure against said at least one underbelt insert.

53. (Currently Amended) The apparatus as claimed in claim ~~[[45]]~~ 44, further comprising devices for application of a tread band to the belt structure, at a radially external position.

54. (Previously Presented) The apparatus as claimed in claim 53, wherein said devices for application of the tread band operate on the auxiliary drum.

55. (Previously Presented) The apparatus as claimed in claim 54, wherein said devices for application of the tread band comprise a feeding unit to supply an elongated element of elastomer material for application of said tread band through spiraling of said elongated element.

56. (Previously Presented) The apparatus as claimed in claim 53, wherein said devices for application of the tread band operate on the primary drum.

57. (Previously Presented) The apparatus as claimed in claim 56, wherein said devices comprise a feeding unit to supply an elongated element of elastomer material for application of said tread band through spiraling of said elongated element.

58. (Previously Presented) The apparatus as claimed in claim 53, further comprising bending devices operating on the expandable support to bend end flaps of the tread band against axially external portions of said at least one underbelt insert associated with the belt structure.